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ABSTRACT

Action Research begins by identifying goals as perceived in the community; input is sought in neighborhood hearings or by running a series in the local newspaper and inviting response. Once a research group is organized, Action Research continues as a five-stage flexible study plan for practitioner improvement involving turning goals into researchable problems, breaking problems into their important parts, choosing fact-finding techniques, collecting and analyzing data, and presenting conclusions and recommendations. Stage 4, for example, entails recruiting volunteers for data collection on a geographical basis and classifying "raw data." That Action Research can be successful is shown in several examples, including one in which a Maryland fact finding project led to the formation of a local foundation to foster new community problem-solving approaches. The guide includes a short bibliography and a five-page skeleton planning aid. (KS)

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AN EASY GUIDE TO ACTION RESEARCH FOR THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

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AN EASY GUIDE TO ACTION RESEARCH FOR THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

What is Action Research? Action Research in education is study undertaken by practitioners in order that they might improve their practices.

Action Research calls for broad involvement and should be a flexible study plan, with time for the participants to grow in the process of studying the problem and most important of all assurance that action be taken toward a solution to the problem under study.

Parker Palmer and Elden Jacobsen, authors of ACTION RESEARCH, A NEW STYLE OF POLITICS IN EDUCATION summarize how to get started with action research:

> "The first stage of an action research program offers excellent opportunities for bringing people along. One might try to define the problem by holding neighborhood hearings to discover what issues are on people's minds, hosting a series of living room discussions throughout the community, or running a series of living room discussions throughout the community, or running a series in the local newspaper inviting response. . .
>
> "While most research begins in the mind of the researcher, Action Research begins by developing that focus out of the larger community. It is important to do so, even when the leader thinks she/he knows what is on people's minds, for it is critical that an action research program be owned by the community from the very outset".

3 basic values local school systems derive from doing action research:

1. Fact finding is the foundation of educational research.
2. Putting research to work at the local level.
3. It can enhance the professional development, not only of the administrators but all those persons involved.

Even though each research group will have its own style, it must include the following stages:

1. Develop the goal into a researchable problem
2. Break the researchable problem into its most important parts
3. Choose the fact finding techniques
4. Collect and analyze the data
5. Presentation of the conclusions and recommendations.

DEVELOP THE GOAL INTO A RESEARCHABLE PROBLEM:

1. The problem can be presented either as a declarative sentence or a question(s).
2. State the problem in such a way that it reflects what you really want to know.
3. State the method planned for the research. State it so it can be solved by evidence. Avoid judgements.

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4. Ideas and terms in the stated problem must mean the same thing to any one reading the problem. If necessary, define the term.
5. Avoid "jumping off points" in stating the problem. Avoid making assumptions as the problem is developed.
6. Remain flexible, within limits.

BREAK THE RESEARCHABLE PROBLEM INTO ITS MOST IMPORTANT PARTS:

1. Decide the parts of the problem which are the most important.
2. Set specific priorities for investigation.
3. Determine what is most important.
4. Build the study around specific hypotheses. State the hypotheses in usable form--hypotheses, subquestions, headings.
5. Make some choices about which hypotheses are most pertinent.
6. If necessary, differing opinions may be cast as alternate hypotheses.

CHOOSE THE FACT FINDING TECHNIQUES

1. Participant observation field techniques
2. Depth interviews
3. Document research
4. Surveys
5. Develop the research instrument and pretest the instrument
   Select a small sample of population
   Provide space on the instrument for reactions to the instrument
   Administer under conditions similar to those to prevail under the study
   Check the responses
   Analyze the results and the overall reactions
   Make the necessary appropriate changes

COLLECT AND ANALYZE THE DATA

1. Select volunteers for collecting data carefully.
2. Recruit about 25% more than it is anticipated will be needed
3. Recruit on a geographical basis.
4. Do not get discouraged--this is a "low ebb" position in research.
5. Have a training program for the volunteers
6. Summarize and classify the "raw data"
7. Consider using a competent resource person for analyzing data.

PRESENTATION OF THE CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Think about the implications of the research prior to making any recommendations.
2. The research group must agree on the interpretation and use of the study.
3. Capitalize on the fact that the problem has been researched.
4. Develop fact sheets and hold hearings on the facts.

ACTION RESEARCH is a new style of politics, education, and community action. The very process of action research, with its wide involvement of community people is a form of action.

SUCCESSFUL ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS:

1. In Springfield, Virginia, students and parents worked on on curriculum evaluation projects that led to the creation of a permanent parent student watchdog organization.

2. In Gloucester City, New Jersey, senior citizens did their own survey of elderly needs. In cooperation with the school system and the state, they assessed problems and developed recommendations for policy makers.

3. In Takoma Park-Silver Springs, Maryland, fact finding led to the formation of a local foundation to foster new approaches to community problem solving.

4. In Dedham, Massachusetts, a three year League of Woman Voters studied the public schools and inspired the initiation of a town wide, interagency coalition on public education.

The process of action research is well tested, but infrequently reported. It is a powerful tool for cutting problems down to size.

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Barnes, John B. — EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

Burges, Bill — FACTS FOR A CHANGE

Crita D. Labine

SKELETON PLANNING AID:

NOTE: THIS AID MAY BE USED TO STIMULATE THINKING AND COMMITING IT TO WRITING. IT MAY BE DONE IN SMALL GROUPS AND THEN CONSOLIDATED.

PROJECT GOAL:_____

_____

CURRENT SITUATION:_____

_____

WHAT ARE THE NEEDS? (THE DIFFERENCE IN THE GOAL & CURRENT SITUATION)

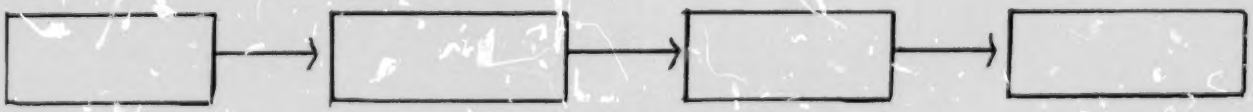
_____

_____

MAKE A LIST OF THE ACTIVITIES NEEDED TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL.

MAJOR ACTIVITY	WHO	WHEN	HOW	RESOURCE COMMITMENT

MAKE A FLOW CHART: DRAW A DIAGRAM SHOWING THE MAJOR STEPS IN THE PROJECT FROM BEGINNING TO END, THAT IS, THOSE THAT SEEM TO BE THE STEPS AT THIS STAGE OF PLANNING. BE SURE TO BUILD ACCOMPLISHMENT DATES INTO THE PROJECT FLOW.



BUILDING RESEARCHABLE PROBLEMS

RESEARCHABLE PROBLEM	COMMENTS	REVISED PROBLEM
1. STUDENTS IN OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM CAN'T REALLY READ WELL	THIS TAKES A POSITION BUT THAT IS DIFFICULT TO PROVE. REALLY HAS NO RESEARCH ANSWER. WELL IS A VALUE JUDGEMENT. SUGGESTING DIRECTIONS FOR CHANGE WOULD BE HELPFUL	ARE STUDENTS IN OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM READING AT GRADE LEVEL? IF NOT, WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE READING SCORES?
2. WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT DESEGREGATION?	WHAT IS THE MEANING OF "DO ABOUT"? IT MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE.	HOW CAN OUR COMMUNITY PREPARE FOR THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF COURT-ORDERED SCHOOL DESEGREGATION?
3. WHY IS THE CURRICULUM IN OUR SCHOOLS SO BAD?	THE PROBLEM TAKES A POSITION BUT DOES SO BASED ON A TERM "BAD" THAT CAN NOT BE DEFINED EXCEPT IN A VALUE JUDGEMENT.	DIRECTIONS FOR CHANGE: EVALUATING THE CURRICULUM AT OUR SCHOOL...
4. PARENTS SHOULD BE MORE INVOLVED IN SCHOOL RELATED DECISIONS.	THE PROBLEM HERE IS THE VALUE JUDGEMENT "SHOULD". SCHOOL RELATED IS VAGUE.	

CRITERIA FOR DEVELOPING HYPOTHESES

1. HYPOTHESES ARE WRITTEN AS STATEMENTS --OFTEN IN "IF"..."THEN"...FORMAT.
2. A HYPOTHESIS MAY FREQUENTLY EXPRESS A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VARIABLES, OR IDEAS THAT ARE BEING MEASURED.
3. HYPOTHESES SHOULD REFLECT THE RESEARCHER'S PRIORITIES ABOUT A PROBLEM.
4. HYPOTHESES IN ACTION RESEARCH FOCUS ON GETTING INFORMATION WHICH IS AVAILABLE, NOT OUT OF REACH.
5. HYPOTHESES SHOULD POINT TO CAUSES, RELATIONSHIPS, AND SOLUTIONS ABOUT WHICH SOMETHING CAN BE DONE.
6. AT LEAST ONE HYPOTHESIS SHOULD BE DIRECTLY AIMED AT FINDING FEASIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM.
7. HYPOTHESES SHOULD FLOW FROM EXPLORATORY STUDIES OR OTHER FORMS OF PILOT TESTING.
8. A HYPOTHESIS IS A TENTATIVE ANSWER TO PART OF THE RESEARCHABLE PROBLEM. SET FORTH TO GUIDE THE INVESTIGATION OF THE PROBLEM.

QUESTIONS FOR PERTINENT ANALYSIS

1. WHAT IMPORTANT POINTS DO THE DATA REVEAL?
2. ARE THE TOTALS SIGNIFICANT? WHY?
3. HOW CAN CATEGORIES BE ARRANGED AND COMBINED TO REVEAL IMPORTANT FACTS? IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS?
4. ARE THE RESULTS DIFFERENT THAN YOU EXPECTED?
5. CAN THE OBVIOUS EXCEPTIONS TO THE CONCLUSIONS OR TO DOMINANT PATTERNS BE EXPLAINED?
6. WHAT PATTERNS OR TRENDS SHOW UP? CAN THEY BE EXPLAINED?
7. DO ANY CASUAL RELATIONSHIPS OR CORRELATIONS SEEM IMPORTANT?
8. WHAT COMMUNITY FACTORS INFLUENCE THE DATA?
9. HOW DO DATA FROM VARIOUS SOURCES--SURVEYS, READINGS, DEPTH INTERVIEWS, DOCUMENTS, COMPARE OR CONTRAST?
10. WHAT ARE THE OVERALL CONCLUSIONS?
11. WHAT PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE EMERGE FROM THOSE CONCLUSIONS?

C O N C L U S I O N S A N D R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S ------

A. F I V E Q U E S T I O N S

1. WHAT NEEDS ARE INDICATED BY THE DATA?

2. WHAT ARE AT LEAST THREE DISTINCT ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS THAT MIGHT BE RECOMMENDED TO MEET THOSE NEEDS?

3. WOULD THE ACTIVITIES NEEDED TO EXECUTE THOSE APPROACHES BE RECEIVED WARMLY OR HOSTILY BY THE COMMUNITY?

4. HOW CAN YOU EXERCISE LEVERAGE TO ACCOMPLISH THE PROPOSAL?

5. WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT TO ACHIEVE EVEN IF THERE IS SIGNIFICANT OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSAL?

B. REALITY CHECK ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. WILL THE RECOMMENDATION MAKE CLEAR SENSE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC?

2. WHO WILL FAVOR/OPPOSE THE PROPOSALS?

3. WHAT IF EARLY (OR UNEXPECTED) OPPOSITION DEVELOPS?

4. WHAT RESOURCES WILL IT REQUIRE TO ADAPT/IMPLEMENT IT?

5. ARE THOSE RESOURCES READILY AVAILABLE?

6. WILL THE RECOMMENDATION EFFECTIVELY RESOLVE THE PROBLEM AT WHICH IT IS AIMED?